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Records of Black-browed Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus bistrigiceps* from Luzon, Philippines

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We detail records in 2008 and 2009 of Black-browed Reed Warblers *Acrocephalus bistrigiceps* from Candaba, Pampanga Province, Luzon, Philippines, made during searches for Streaked Reed Warbler *A. sorghophilus*, conducted jointly on behalf of the Wild Bird Club of the Philippines and The Wetland Trust, UK.

On 24 April 2008 at c.07h30, THF and PDR heard short, soft ‘chacking’ sounds from a small *Acrocephalus* warbler in a narrow margin of *Phragmites* along a track at the entrance to the ‘Mayor’s Pond’, Barangay Visal San Pablo, Candaba (15°04’N 120°53’E). THF saw the first bird, and this, then a second, flew across the track. The initial assumption was that both were Streaked Reed Warblers, since this was the only species of small *Acrocephalus* then recorded in Philippines. The views were fleeting (PDR never saw the first individual), but the second individual showed a plain mantle and PDR’s immediate impression was that it looked very like a Black-browed Reed Warbler. THF made ‘pishing’ noises and at least one of the two birds responded by singing. PDR made a tape of the song with a Sennheiser ME 66 microphone and a Sony MD player, and played the tape back. This attracted the bird. Views were initially fleeting, but eventually it climbed towards the tops of reed-stems where it was seen initially breast-on and then later back-on, at ranges of 5–10 m. The combination of the head pattern, in which a broad, black lateral crown-stripe contrasted with a pale central crown and a broad, long creamy supercilium, and the unstreaked upperparts left us in no doubt that it was a Black-browed Reed Warbler. Black-browed Reed Warbler differs from Paddyfield Warbler *A. agricola* and Manchurian Reed Warbler *A. tangorum* (neither of which has yet been recorded in Philippines) in its bold and long black brow, which contrasts markedly with the pale central crown. It differs from Streaked Reed Warbler in its plain (instead of streaked) upperparts which lack a contrasting rufous rump; and from all three species by its slightly shorter tail in which the individual rectrices are broader and more rounded at the tip.

Erection of an 18 m mist-net in an attempt to catch the bird took longer than expected as the net was tangled. The minidisk player and a small speaker were placed on

the ground beneath the net, with the disk set to play repeatedly the song PDR had just taped. However, there was no obvious response and the bird ceased singing within c.15 minutes of the net being erected and was not seen again.

PDR and Madsen Bajarias returned to the site at 05h00 on 27 April and immediately erected 2 × 18 m superfine small-mesh mist-nets and 1 × 12 m regular small-mesh mist-net in series along the *Phragmites*-fringed track. This was again accompanied by continuous playback of the same recorded song. THF and Jon Hornbuckle arrived shortly afterwards. No small *Acrocephalus* were either seen or heard until 06h45 when MB commenced to extract a small bird from the net. JH approached and determined that it was a Black-browed Reed Warbler and took over the extraction. The bird was placed in a bag and was examined at approximately 07h15, by which time Carmela Española, Michael C. Lu, Felix Servita and Joey Zaballero were also present. A detailed plumage description and biometrics were recorded (by PDR), after which the bird was photographed (Plate 1) and released.

Plate 1. Black-browed Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus bistrigiceps* caught at Candaba, Philippines, 27 April 2008. (P. D. Round/The Wetland Trust)



The trapped bird appeared significantly warmer-coloured and less worn than the bird seen well on 24 April, suggesting that two different Black-browed Reed Warblers were present. Wing length was 51 mm and tail length 46 mm. The body plumage, coverts and tertials were little worn, imparting a relatively warm brown tone to the upperparts, suggesting that the bird had undergone a moult of some or most contour feathers during the winter. This also suggested that this was probably a different individual to the bird seen well on 24 April (which appeared greyer-brown above and whiter, less buffy below). It is assumed, therefore, that two Black-browed Reed Warblers were present (both the birds—the first glimpsed only—seen on 24 April).

In 2009 an individual was located by PDR in a patch of *Phragmites* in a water-filled ditch (c.400 m distant from the previous sightings) at c.17h00 on 16 March 2009, shortly after its short chacking calls were heard. It was in view for only a few seconds, but the distinctive head pattern and unstreaked upperparts left no doubt that it was a Black-browed Reed Warbler.

These are apparently the first records for the Philippines. The Black-browed Reed Warbler breeds widely in north-east Asia, Central Asia, northern, central and eastern China and northern Japan, and winters commonly in south-east China and in the South-East Asian mainland south to Sumatra (Robson 2000,

Dickinson 2003). Written accounts of both the 2008 and 2009 sightings (photographs and full biometrics and wing formula of the bird in the hand) are filed with the Philippine Bird Records Committee.

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Counts of Steppe Eagles *Aquila nipalensis* at a carcass dump in Jorbeer, Rajasthan, India

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The Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis* (Hodgson 1833) has an estimated global population of 100,000–1,000,000 individuals (Ferguson-Lees and Christie 2001) and is regarded as the most common wintering *Aquila* eagle in the Indian subcontinent (Naoroji 2006). In India, the species has a widespread winter distribution in the northern and central states (see Naoroji 2006). Wintering population estimates are not available, but counts of migrating flocks over the Himalayas in Himachal Pradesh (Donald 1923, ven Besten 2004) and Nepal (de Roder 1989, DeCandido *et al.* 2001, Gurung *et al.* 2004) suggest that at least thousands of eagles winter in India, and that their arrival is staggered over October–November with birds departing during February–March each year. Little is known about the wintering ecology of the species. Juveniles and adults of the Steppe Eagle are suspected to prefer different wintering locations and habitats (Naoroji 2006). Other than some observations on the migrating population in Nepal that suggest that young birds predominate in wintering areas (de Roder 1989), little is

known of the age composition of the wintering population of the species. In this study we estimated the abundance of wintering Steppe Eagles every fortnight at a carcass dump in Jorbeer, western Rajasthan, India over three consecutive winters in 2003–2006. We specifically ascertained (1) numbers of individuals at the site, (2) the age composition of wintering Steppe Eagles, and (3) whether eagle counts at Jorbeer follow patterns similar to those observed during counts of migrating birds over the Himalaya.

STUDY AREA

Jorbeer is a dumping site for cattle carcasses, situated 10 km from Bikaner city, Rajasthan (Figure 1). The site is in the Thar Desert at 235 m above mean sea level, with a landscape dominated by arid, undulating sand dunes with sparse desert vegetation. The climate is dry with an average annual rainfall of 260–270 mm and temperatures